

## Chance to play in Champions League

By Kirill Karin

**Minsk Yunost hockey players will qualify for restored tournament if they win Continental Cup super-finals, held in mid-January at Minsk-Arena**

The Champions Hockey League, launched for the 2008-2009 season, was cancelled due to the global financial crisis. However, the International Ice Hockey Federation's Council has recently approved its restoration, with three seasons scheduled.

The 16 teams will be divided into four groups, with 14 clubs representing seven leading European hockey countries: Germany, Russia, Slovakia, Finland, the Czech Republic, Sweden and Switzerland (champions and winners of regular seasons). The winner of the Continental Cup will become the 15th team while the final place is being granted to the winner of the 2009 Champions Hockey League: ZSC Lions Zurich.

The preliminary stage

will consist of a double round-robin in groups, with the two best teams from each quartet reaching the play-offs. The Champions League begins in September 2011 while the final matches are scheduled for January 2012.

"The debut season of the Champions League showed that European hockey is ready for a pan-continental league. It proved that all interested sides will benefit from this league, particularly hockey clubs and their numerous fans. Fifty European top-ranked clubs annually attract around 18m fans to their rinks. No other team sport, except for football, has similar results. Together, we're ready to offer even more exciting hockey to this faithful group of fans," notes IIHF President Rene Fazel.

In the Continental Cup's super-finals, hosted by Minsk-Arena, Yunost Minsk will play against Austrian Red Bull Salzburg (the winner of the previous tournament), French Rouen and Danish Sønderjyske.



Darya Domracheva successfully begins the season

## Frosty test of willpower

Biathlon season begins with races at Östersund and Hochfilzen

By Yuri Karpenko

The World Cup debut stage in Sweden was accompanied by strong frost and organisers were concerned over possible cancellation (in line with the existing regulations, this happens when minus 20 degrees are registered outside). However, this did not happen and there were no doubts that the Belarusian team would do well, having been performing successfully. Its leader, Darya Domracheva, did not leave Östersund without a medal, for the second year in a row. She replaced her third place in the 2009/10 season individual race with a similar position in the sprint. Afterwards, she admitted that the frost was so strong that her fingers had frozen.

In the pursuit, Domracheva fought fiercely, and found herself in eighth position when her luck ran out at the last firing position. However, she managed to take part in the

prestigious and honourable flower ceremony. Darya clearly showed that has serious plans for the World Championship, being held in Russian Khanty-Mansiysk next March.

Other athletes also showed their mettle, with Nadezhda Skardino and Lyudmila Kalinichik performing well in the sprint. Nadezhda Pisareva, competing for the first time in the event, demonstrated stability. Meanwhile, Yevgeny Abramenko was good at shooting, though lagged behind in speed. No doubt, Sergey Novikov, Rustam Valiullin and Alexander Syman will do well in future; their experience will help the team.

At the World Cup second round in Austrian Hochfilzen, Darya Domracheva has proven her serious intentions for this season's medals. She came second in the sprint, losing only to Anastasiya Kuzmina of Slovakia, and also won a bronze medal in the pursuit race.

## Scoring masterpiece by Mikhail Grabovsky

By Yuri Kovalev

**Belarusian legionary becomes major hero of match between Washington and Toronto, as part of NHL Regular Championship**

Grabovsky played an inspiring match and directly contributed to the Maple Leafs' victory over one of the leaders in the Eastern Conference. With Washington already leading 4:1, the Belarusian sportsman managed to return hope to his partners by scoring a goal. Then, his team brought the match into overtime, by scoring three times in the final three minutes of the last, third period. An additional period didn't reveal a



Grabovsky's penalty shoot-outs are unpredictable

winner, so everyone prepared for a series of penalty shoot-outs. Grabovsky again played a key role, skating towards goalie Michal Neuvirth, pivoting in front and, with his back to the net, scoring with a back-

handed shot to the right post.

At the 2009 World Championship in Switzerland, Grabovsky's similar amazing shoot was disallowed, yet nobody doubted its legitimacy in the NHL.

## Even more awards could have been taken

**Belarus' Thai boxing team wins five gold medals at World Championship in Bangkok**

Over the past three years, the Belarusian team has won the overall standings at the World and European championships. This year, it has already been placed first at the continental team tournament. With good reason, fans anticipated another success at the World Championship, being hosted, as is traditional in early December, in Thailand (the homeland of this sport). It gathered a record number

of countries (over 90) and athletes (1,000) with our Belarusians winning seven adult medals, including five gold: by Yekaterina Vandarieva (under 54kg), Yelena Muratova (57kg), Alla Ivashkevich (60kg), Marina Kalinina (71kg) and Dmitry Valent (75kg). As a result, the women's team came first in the overall standings. Meanwhile, Vandarieva was acknowledged the best sportswoman of the World Championship (first time in the history of Belarusian Muay-Thai).

Sadly, there was also a

negative aspect to the contest, with Belarusian fans and squad coaches convinced that the judges were being biased. Perhaps tired of being placed second (after Belarus), the hosts ensured that the prestigious trophy — a large silver cup for the overall winning team — remained at home this year. In a number of fights featuring famous Belarusian athletes (whose advantage seemed obvious), the judges voted for their rivals, causing an emotional reaction from fans. Appeals by the team's heads fell on deaf ears.

## Warm up before major starts

**Freestyle skiing athlete Anton Kushnir, who topped last season's World Cup overall standings, begins new season with victories**

This year, the Freestyle World Cup is to begin on December 18th in Chinese Beida Lake. Accordingly, each skier is training thoroughly, with most of the Europeans polishing their programmes at the famous Finish base in Ruka. The latter has been hosting the first events of the World Cup rounds, featuring

freestyle skiing athletes from Switzerland, the UK, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Australia.

Some countries failed to send full teams, with Alexey Grishin, Dmitry Dashchinsky and Alla Tsuper absent from the Belarusian squad. However, Anton (who won last year's Small and Big Crystal Globes) was a true success, testing his readiness for the World Cup. On the first day of the competition, he considerably outstripped his rivals, jumping quite bril-

liantly. His major opponents — Enver Ablav of Ukraine and Renato Ulrich of Switzerland — had to be satisfied with second and third place respectively.

In the second World Cup round, Kushnir also secured a convincing victory, performing an even more complex programme. Renato Ulrich came second and Denis Osipov claimed bronze. In the women's tournament, Belarus' Anna Guskova, 18, took bronze during the second round.

## Third among the strongest

By Kirill Pirogov

**Vladimir Samsonov placed third in tournament featuring strongest ping pong players**

The Volkswagen Cup, hosted by German Braunschweig, featured sixteen of the world's best table tennis players (eight men and women). The tournament was especially interesting, since each country was represented by just one man and woman. Belarusian

Vladimir Samsonov was among them.

The tournament's clear rules operated without a group stage, beginning immediately with play-offs. In the quarter-finals, Vladimir once again defeated Korean Joo Se Hyuk (whom he has defeated three times in his past three matches). The spectacular match saw Samsonov attacking swiftly, leaving his rival no option but to defend himself. From time to time, the Korean made progress but Vladimir's su-



Samsonov in action

riority was evident.

In the semi-finals, Vladimir faced Chinese Ma Long, who has defeated him in nine out of 13 previous matches.

Once again, the Chinese player claimed victory in the semi-finals and was awarded a silver medal. German Timo Boll won the tournament overall.